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Implementation of the Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem: follow-up to the high-level review by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, in view of the special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem to be held in 2016

Preparation for the special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem in 2016

Written statement submitted by the Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs

The Secretary-General has received the following paper, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.7/2015/1.

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Summary Report form the Fourth VNGOC Civil Society Hearing*

This document intends to provide a summary of a selection of the main points raised at the Civil Society Hearing as contribution to the preparations for the 2016 United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS). The Hearing was held on 9 March 2015 as Special Event of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. It was as an initiative of the Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs, in cooperation with the New York NGO Committee on Drugs and UNODC. Mr. Esbjörn Hörnberg, Chair of the VNGOC and Chair of the Civil Society Task Force for UNGASS 2016, and Heather Haase, Chair of the NYNGOC and Vice-Chair of the Civil Society Task Force for UNGASS 2016 co-chaired the Hearing. Mr. Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of UNODC and H.E. Ambassador Khaled Shamaa, Chair of the UNGASS Board presented their introductory remarks. Distinguished guests such as H.E. Ambassador György Martin Zanathy, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the International Organizations in Vienna as well as Mr. Michael Botticelli, Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy of the United States of America addressed the audience.

The Hearing was structured around two panels each addressing the following themes:

- Expectations and support from Members States on the Civil Society Task Force, featuring also the presentation of the Civil Society Task Force Members and the preview of the Global Civil Society Survey for UNGASS 2016.
- Civil Society Expectations for UNGASS 2016, incorporating feedback and views from civil society grass-root organizations around the globe.

While many specific contributions had been presented by both panellists and audience, there were general points and themes that had been identified as crucial and that could provide food for thought and contribute to the discussion and interaction among Member States and civil society in preparation for UNGASS 2016 session. These include:

1. Civil Society participation in the UNGASS preparation and the UNGASS session through the Civil Society Task Force

There was a widespread support for the creation of the Civil Society Task Force, from Member States, UNODC and NGOs. The Civil Society Task Force is a joint initiative by the Vienna NGO Committee and the New York NGO Committee. It has 31 members and represents the widest possible array of civil society active in the field of drugs. The Task Force is ready and operational and it will gather input from a broad spectrum of civil society, including growers and farmer groups, indigenous people, those who have experience of using drugs, affected families and community groups, as well as whose involved in delivery of prevention, harm reduction, treatment, recovery, social reinsertion services and the access to essential medicines, from all around the globe. NGOs are known to bring experience and evidence of what works. They also bring ideas and innovation, based on their hands on experience and information from the ground.

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2. **UNGASS it is broadly seen as an opportunity for addressing the Drug Problem in an open, inclusive and modern way**

Civil Society looks at the UNGASS as an opportunity to engage in a dialogue with Member States. NGOs feel it must not be just a repetition of the statements of the past but a space for fresh ideas and opportunity for innovation, considering new approaches in going forward.

3. **The United Nations Conventions, process and instruments should play an essential role in the UNGASS, as well as the inclusion of United Nations agencies and branches to secure overall coherence in the drug policy and its implementation**

The entire spectrum of drug related interventions should be influenced and consistent with all United Nations conventions, policies and processes and all should be brought to the table at UNGASS, including resolutions from previous meetings of relevant United Nations actors and partners. This includes, for example, WHO, UNICEF, UNAIDS, UNDP among others.

4. **There was a widespread support to adopt a public health approach in the context of drug control**

As emerged also from the Third Civil Society Hearing in 2014, NGOs recalled the need of building a commonly understood, broad understanding of what a health-based approach should be. There was common agreement on the necessity to put health back in to the centre of focus for UNGASS as originally intended by the Drug Conventions. There is an increasing request for further elaborations on how the concept is to be interpreted in the real world and could be best applied by those working in law enforcement, regulatory regimes, development groups, community level groups, local governments, as well as those at local level and beyond. Attention should be given also to the identification of targets and indicators that would provide feedback on what works and what could be improved.

5. **Access to services and treatment should be secured according to the need of each individual, placing human beings at the core of drug policies**

The full range of prevention, harm reduction, treatment and recovery responses have to be accessible and available for all, including addressing co-occurring conditions such as hepatitis, HIV, and a range of health problems as well as mental health and other physical difficulties.

6. **Global access to essential medicines should be a priority**

Civil Society advocates to urgently eliminate the barriers that deny access to treatment and pain relief to millions of citizens. It cannot be acceptable to anyone that over 75 per cent of the world population has no or very limited access to essential medicine for pain relief and medical purposes.

7. **Special consideration should be been given to drug prevention, the Rights of the Child and the protection of the children from drugs**

This prevention approach should also include a broad total population perspective, considering ways to prevent and protect the members of all society, especially the

children, from the problems associated with drugs and also the problems associated with drug laws and responses to drugs as these can be harmful to themselves.

8. **Engagement of drug users, recovered drug users, families and communities will provide an added value to the UNGASS**

It was acknowledged that these groups have a lot of expertise and would provide a unique point of views from those affected by the drug problem and Member States would benefit from hearing their contributions.

9. **Alternative development should have a higher profile in the UNGASS and beyond and be connected with the broad concept of development**

Alternative development includes much more than direct crop replacement and should be considered more broadly. UNGASS should include more firmly other United Nations development agencies and be linked to the millennium development agenda. There is a need to build strong institutions and infrastructure including appropriate legal frameworks fostering development. Furthermore it was highlighted that inequality in society is a potent factor in marginalization and delay development.

10. **Support for the principle of proportionality for drug related offences and abolition of death penalty**

Civil society is in favour of promoting the principle of proportionality for drug related offences advocating for alternatives to the criminal justice approach, supporting treatment instead of incarceration for drug addicts. Furthermore it has been highlighted that the use of death penalty has been denounced by many speakers at the annual sessions of CND, as well as representatives of the United Nations and INCB. Civil society urges the CND also work to resolve this impasse and advocate for a more human interventions in favour of providing drug addicts with opportunities for treatment and recovery instead of punishment.

The VNGOC and the Civil Society Task Force are committed to steer and enhance a global NGO engagement and to ensure a balanced and inclusive input from Civil Society into the UNGASS process.

This input will include the results of a number of regional consultations with a large number of local civil society organizations, gathering their experience of working on the ground. It will also consist of the findings of a global civil society survey conducted by the Civil Society Task Force. By collecting the broadest possible experiences from global civil society, we will bring further detail and clarity to the above issues towards the 2016 UNGASS.